

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8163

AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

AMCONSUL UDORN

AMCONSUL SONGKHLA

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 2921

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SUMMARY. THE TRANSFER OF THE GOVERNOR OF PATTANI PROVINCE IN LATE JANUARY LED TO OTHER CHANGES IN GOVERNORS. AMCONSULS REPORT TRANSFERS OF GOVERNORS OF LAMPHUN AND LAMPANG PROVINCES PROBABLY MOTIVATED BY POLITICS. ON THE WHOLE CHANGES WERE FOR THE BETTER, WITH YOUNDER, MORE ABLE MEN REPLACING OLDER, LESS CAPABLE OFFICIALS. END SUMMARY.

1. ON JANUARY 27 CHALO WANNAPHUTI, UNDER SECRETARY OF INTERIOR, ANNOUNCED ADDITIONAL GUBERNATORIAL TRANSFERS, EFFECTIVE AS OF FEBRUARY 1, 1976. THESE ROUNDED OUT THE TRANSFERS REPORTED IN REF B. SHORTLY AFTER THIS LATEST ANNOUNCEMENT PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT PRAMOT DENIED HE HAD A HAND IN THESE TRANSFERS BUT NEVERTHELESS PROMISED THAT NO FURTHER TRANSFERS WOULD OCCUR BEFORE THE APRIL 4 ELECTIONS. THOSE TRANSFERRED ON JANUARY 27 WERE: PRAMO HONGSAKUN, VICE GOVERNOR, PATTANI, TO GOVERNOR, UTHAI THANI; SAK KOSAYAKANON, DEPUTY GOVERNOR, NAKHON SI THAMMARAT, TO VICE GOVERNOR, PATTANI; AND PHAITUN KENGSAKUN, GOVERNOR OF UTHAI THANI, TO INSPECTOR GENERAL, MINISTRY OF INTERIOR. BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION AVAILABLE
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TO THE EMBASSY FOLLOWS SEPTTEL.

2. THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS ARE BASED ON REPORTS FROM AMCONSULS CHIANG MAI, UDORN AND SONGKHLA. THE FORCED TRANSFER OF PATTANI GOVERNOR PRASIT KOMONMAN, WHO WAS TRANSFERRED AS PART OF THE RTG DEAL WITH MUSLIM PROTESTORS, MADE POSSIBLE A FURTHER REALIGNMENT OF GOVERNORSHIPS BEFORE THE APRIL 4 ELECTIONS AND LONG BEFORE THE CUSTOMARY OCTOBER 1 CHANGES. IN GENERAL THE CHANGES WERE FOR THE BETTER WITH YOUNGER, MORE ABLE MEN REPLACING OLDER, LESS CAPABLE OFFICIALS. HOWEVER, AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI SUGGESTS THAT POLITICS WAS THE MAIN REASON FOR THE TRANSFERS OF THE GOVERNORS OF LAMPHUN AND LAMPANG PROVINCES.

3. AS REPORTED IN REF A, THE TRANSFERS OF THE PATTANI GOVERNOR AND VICE GOVERNOR WERE INTENDED TO SATISFY MUSLIM PROTESTORS, ALTHOUGH THESE TWO MEN WERE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SITUATION IN PATTANI. THE GOVERNOR, PRASIT KOMONMAN, HAD ONLY RECENTLY ARRIVED. THE APPOINTMENT OF TOEMSAK SAMANTARAT TO REPLACE HIM WAS A GOOD MOVE BY THE RTG, NOT ONLY BECAUSE HE IS CAPABLE AND HAS A GOOD REPUTATION, BUT BECAUSE HE IS A MUSLIM AND THE SON OF THE FORMER MUSLIM ADMINISTRATOR OF PATTANI, A PREDOMINANTLY MUSLIM PROVINCE.

4. PRASIT WAS TRANSFERRED TO SMALL, BACKWATER PHICHIT PROVINCE, REPLACING YOUNG, ABLE SAWAI SIRIMONGKHON, WHO WAS PROMOTED TO LAMPANG, SO CALLED HOME OF THE SOCIAL ACTION PARTY (SAP). PHICHIT WAS SAWAI'S FIRST GOVERNORSHIP AND, WITH HELP FROM AN OUTSTANDING DEPUTY GOVERNOR, HE MADE THE MOST OF IT. EARLIER THIS MONTH FARMERS FROM PHICHIT DEMONSTRATED IN BANGKOK IN FAVOR OF THE CONTROVERSIAL RTG RICE POLICY, AND THUS IN SUPPORT OF PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT. THE DEMONSTRATION MIGHT HAVE BEEN A FACTOR IN SAWAI'S PROMOTION.

5. LAMPANG GOVERNOR SAMRAN BUSAPAWANIT PROBABLY INCURRED THE WRATH OF HIS SUPERIORS LAST YEAR WHEN HE OPENLY SIDED WITH LOCAL RESIDENTS AGAINST THE OWNERS OF THE MAE LIANG MINE, FORCING THE LATTER TO CLOSE. BY ACTING AGAINST THE MINE OPERATORS, EVEN IF WITH CONSIDERABLE REASON, HE APPEARED TO SUPPORT OTHERS PROTESTING AGAINST MINERALS
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EXPLOITATION AND, BY EXTENSION, AGAINST FOREIGN INVESTMENT IN THE MINERALS INDUSTRY, A KEY PLANK IN THE GOVERNMENT'S FINANCIAL POLICY.

6. DR. THAWAT MAKKARAPHONG, LAMPHUN'S MERCURIAL GOVERNOR FOR THE PAST FOUR MONTHS, WAS TRANSFERRED BECAUSE HE EVIDENTLY DID NOTHING TO PLACATE THE LOCAL ELITE WHO HAD OPPOSED HIM SINCE HIS ARRIVAL. HE BROUGHT IN TWO SWARTHY BODYGUARDS WITH HIM FROM THE SOUTH, HELD PERMANENT "OPEN HOUSE" FOR LOCAL ACTIVISTS, PERSONALLY INSPECTED ALL MINES

IN THE PROVINCE AND CLOSED ONE, CARRIED OUT AN ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN WITHIN THE PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION, AND REGULARLY APPEARED AT PUBLIC FUNCTIONS IN NEIGHBOURING CHIANG MAI PROVINCE TO THE OBVIOUS DISTRESS OF THE LOCAL GOVERNOR. IN PARTICULAR THAWAT CULTIVATED THE LARGE UNIVERSITY OF CHIANG MAI STUDENT POPULATION, EVEN ACCEPTING A POST AS PART TIME POLITICAL SCIENCE LECTURER AT CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY. HE CONTINUED TO OPPOSE GOVERNMENT'S PLANS TO PERMIT A LARGE DUTCH COMPANY TO EXPLOIT TIN DEPOSITS OFFSHORE FROM HIS FORMER PROVINCE OF PHANG NGA. THIS ACTION WAS IN DEFIANCE OF CLEARLY ESTABLISHED GOVERNMENT POLICY.

7. THE CHANGES IN LAMPANG AND LAMPHUN APPEAR TO BE EFFORTS OF THE KHUKRIT GOVERNMENT TO PLACATE THE LOCAL ELITES, WHO THEN MIGHT BE EXPECTED TO OPEN PURSE STRINGS TO PROVINCIAL SAP CANDIDATES IN THE UPCOMING PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS. THEY ALSO MAY BE READ AS ACTIONS TAKEN AGAINST TWO GOVERNORS WHO DELIBERATELY OPPOSED GOVERNMENT POLICY.

8. THE TRANSFER OF PHAKSU KHAMPU TO BE GOVERNOR OF LAMPHUN CONFIRMS PREVIOUS REPORTS THAT HE IS A YOUNG MAN WITH GOOD CONNECTIONS WHO IS ON THE WAY UP.

9. THE TRANSFER OF SAWAT CHALOEMPHONG FROM THE POST OF GOVERNOR OF LOEI PROVINCE AND HIS REPLACEMENT BY CHALIAU CHARATSI IS A PLUS FOR LOEI. SAWAT IS AN OLD STYLE GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL WHO WAS REPORTEDLY CLOSE TO GENERAL PRAPHAT CHARUSATHIAN, FORMER DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER. SAWAT'S PERFORMANCE IN LOEI, AS WAS PREVIOUSLY THE CASE IN PHETCHABUN PROVINCE, WAS UNIMAGINATIVE
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AND GENERALLY OBLIVIOUS TO LOCAL SENSITIVITIES.
WHITEHOUSE

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